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(54) METHOD FOR AUTOMATICALLY COUNTING ETCHED PITS.

(57) An automatic etched-pit counting method employs a computerized image-processing technique for measuring the density of etched pits on the surface of a semiconductor crystal substrate (wafer) W. The method includes the steps of: calculating an average unit area A_p of an isolated etched pit on the surface of the semiconductor crystal substrate W for each wafer or for each measuring point; dividing the area S_k of superposed collective etched pits k by the average unit area A_p ; converting the obtained quotient into an integer, thereby obtaining the number n_k of the etched pits within the area S_k ; adding together the number (u) of the isolated etched pits and the number n_k of the collective etched pits; and taking the obtained sum total as the number N of all the etched pits of the substrate surface.

EP 0 149 685 A1

Technical Field

The present invention relates to a method of automatically counting the number of etch pits on the surface of a semiconductor crystal substrate (wafer).

Background Art

A semiconductor single crystal is generally produced by the pulling method, the Bridgeman method, and so on. An ingot of the single crystal is sliced to form semiconductor wafers. The surface of the wafer is lapped and polished to form a semiconductor device thereon by means of the epitaxial growth method, the photo etching method, etc.

Since the wafer is a slice of the single crystal, it leaves lattice defects in the form in which they existed in the original crystal. "Etch pits" means recesses corresponding to the lattice defects which appear on the surface of the semiconductor wafer when it is etched by etchant. In a three-dimensional crystal, many lattice defects continuously exist therein in the form of lines. When the crystal is sliced as a wafer, the lines of the lattice defects are interrupted and, therefore, if the surface of the wafer is etched, the interrupted portions of the lattice defects remain as recesses. The etch pits density (EPD) is defined by the number of etch pits per unit area. The value of the EPD represents the amount of lattice defects in the wafer and has many influences on the characteristic of the semiconductor device formed on the wafer. Thus, the count of the number of etch pits is one of the significant parameters to be measured in connection with the production of a semiconductor device.

The etch pits density varies in the seed end, the middle portion and the tail end (in the direction parallel to a growth axis) of a single crystal which has been pulled and varies, even in a single wafer, at the vicinity of the central portion, the intermediate portion and the peripheral portion of the wafer. This means that, for each wafer, the etch pits density must be measured at a large number of points of measurement.

Each of the etch pits is a recess appearing on the wafer surface etched by the use of a proper etchant and has a limited area. The area of a single recess does not always have a fixed value. There are both relatively large and
5 small etch pits. It is significant enough to count the number of etch pits and measuring the area of the respective etch pits is therefore out of the question.

However, the etch pits comprise not only isolated ones, but also overlapping ones. The image of overlapping
10 etch pits does not have a specified contour and though it can be distinguished from a single isolated etch pit, it is difficult to know how many etch pits are involved in a single grouping thereof.

The measurement of the etch pits density of the semi-
15 conductor wafer can be effected by observing the wafer surface enlarged by a microscope and then counting the number of etch pits therein. The counting of the number of etch pits within a fixed area is merely simple work and does not require complex operations.

20 The operator attending to such measurement, however, must continue viewing through the microscope and count the etch pits for many hours, because of the large number of measured points and wafers. Although operation efficiency can be increased in proportion to the operator's skill, he
25 will inevitably become exhausted. Also, counting of the etch pits by means of the human eye will increase the cost of the measurement, because of the limitation on operating speed.

Under such circumstances, various attempts have been
30 made to automatize the counting of the etch pits.

Fig. 1 shows a schematic diagram of an automatic etch pits counting system.

Provided on a microscope 1 is an ITV camera 2 which outputs video signals representing an enlarged image of the
35 surface of a wafer W, the signals being processed by a computer 5. The reference numeral 3 denotes a video controller, 4 denotes a monitor television, and 6 denotes a console for applying operating instructions to the computer,

which has a display for displaying informations such as input instructions and counting results.

The enlarged images of the surface of the wafer W will present various states. Depending on such states, the etch pits density may be low or high. If the etch pits density is high, a plurality of etch pits have a tendency to overlap one another.

Figs. 2 and 3 show respective examples of the enlarged wafer images. Fig. 2 shows one example in which only individually isolated etch pits exist and a single etch pit in the image is shown as a circle.

In the case of the image including only the individually isolated etch pits, the number of etch pits can be automatically counted on the basis of the video signals outputted from the ITV camera 2 and the counted value directly equals the number of etch pits.

In the case of the overlapping etch pits, it is difficult to count them automatically. Fig. 3 is an enlarged diagram showing a wafer having overlapping etch pits. If a plurality of etch pits overlap each other, there is no simple form. Furthermore, the number of overlapping etch pits is indefinite. For example, if two etch pits overlap each other, they appear in the form of dumbbells, and if a number of etch pits overlap each other then a form like a shapeless cloud is presented.

If the operator counts the etch pits with his own eyes, he can perceive and count the number of overlapping etch pits, while viewing the form thereof.

On the other hand, in the case of an automatized system, it is not easy to identify from a grouping of etch pits the number of etch pits included therein. However, calculating the area of an individual etch-pit image can be easily carried out.

According to the prior art, the average area A of an isolated etch pit is predetermined, the area S of the image of a grouping of etch pits is measured and then the area S is arithmetically divided by the average unit area A to estimate the number of etch pits n in the image. Thus,

for each of all the etch-pit images $\{i\}$ within the scope of a visual field, the number of etch pits n_i is estimated to obtain the total number of etch pits in that field.

That is, assuming that the etch-pit images in the visual field are 1, 2, ..., m and the areas thereof are S_1, S_2, \dots, S_m , respectively, the number of etch pits n_i in the i-th etch-pits image is given by

$$n_i = \left[\frac{S_i}{A} \right] \quad (1)$$

and the total number of etch pits N is given by

$$N = \sum_{i=1}^m n_i \quad (2)$$

or

$$N = \sum_{i=1}^m \left[\frac{S_i}{A} \right] \quad (3)$$

where the average unit area A is common to all points on a wafer. In addition, the area A is assumed to present a fixed value for every wafer. The representation $[x]$ means that fractions of .5 and over are counted as a unit and that the rest are disregarded in connection with the value of x.

At this stage, a problem appears. If the total number of etch pits can be estimated by means of the formula (3), it would be very convenient and simple. It should be noted, however, that the unit area of an etch pit varies for every wafer and, even in the same wafer, at every measured point.

Therefore, it is impossible in such a manner to calculate the precise density of etch pits, because of a relatively large counting error.

Disclosure of the Invention

It is an object of the present invention to provide an automatic etch pits counting method of measuring precisely the etch pits density on the wafer.

The automatic etch pits counting method of the prior art has utilized only one average unit area A, in spite of the variation of the measured points thereon.

In contrast, according to the present invention, the average unit area A is calculated and decided for every

wafer, or at every relatively fractionalized measured point thereon.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide an automatic etch pits counting method comprising the steps of enlarging the surface image of a semiconductor single crystal wafer W by a microscope 1, converting the enlarged image to video signals by a TV camera 2, image-processing an etch pit image on the wafer surface by a computer 5 to obtain the area of the etch pit, dividing the area S_k of a grouping of overlapping etch pits k by the average unit area A of an isolated etch pit so as to calculate the number of etch pits n_k included in the area S_k , and obtaining the total number of etch pits N by totalling the number of etch pits n_k all over the wafer to calculate the etch pits density thereof, said method characterized by further including the steps of calculating the average unit area A_p of an isolated etch pit for every wafer or at every measured point thereon, dividing the area S_k of the grouping of overlapping etch pits k by the average unit area A_p , rounding off the quotient such as to be an integer so as to obtain the number of etch pits n_k included in the area S_k , and obtaining the total number of etch pits N by totalling the number of isolated etch pits u and the number of overlapping etch pits n_k .

According to the present invention, the etch pits on a semiconductor wafer are automatically counted and, therefore, the operation for measuring is very fast and precise. Also, the operator is little tired and the number of operators can be reduced.

If the operator counts the etch pits by his own eyes through a microscope, he would count them at 10 points per wafer at least. According to the present invention, it is easy to calculate the EPD at 50 - 100 points of measurement per wafer. Because of the increase of operating efficiency, the number of measured points can be increased and the quality of the semiconductor wafer can be strictly monitored.

According to the present invention, since the average

unit area A_p of the isolated etch pit is obtained for every wafer or at every measured point thereon, precise results of counting, or counting with little error, can be achieved, in comparison with the prior art which uses the average unit area A of a fixed value.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a constitutional diagram showing one embodiment of an automatic etch pits counting system;

Fig. 2 is an enlarged plane view of a wafer surface on which only isolated etch pits exist;

Fig. 3 is an enlarged plane view of a wafer surface in which overlapping etch pits are included; and

Fig. 4 is a diagram showing an etch pits arrangement as an example for the purpose of explaining the steps of the counting system of the present invention.

Modes for Carrying out the Invention

According to the present invention, the average unit area A of an etch pit varies for every wafer or at every measured point thereon and, therefore, such area is defined by suffixing "p", that is, A_p . The suffix "p" is an index given for every wafer or every measured point.

First of all, a method of counting the number of etch pits by determined the average unit area A_p for every measured point on the wafer will be explained.

In the same way as with a conventional system, the wafer W is placed on the sample base of the microscope 1. The enlarged image of the wafer is image-processed and converted to electrical signals by the ITV camera 2. While viewing monitor TV 4, the counting operation is automatically performed by the computer 5.

The following method can be effected by the computer 5 and the instructions from the console 6 thereto and the operator, therefore, does not need to view the image with his own eyes nor to perceive it using his brain.

The steps of the etch pits counting method of this invention are as follows:

Step (1): Picking up the images $\{i\}$ of etch pits from the image of a wafer surface and obtaining the area $\{S_i\}$

thereof;

- Step (2): Discriminating between the images of isolated or non-overlapping etch pits and the images of overlapping etch pits, on the basis of the shapes of the former (or in consideration of the dimension thereof);
- 5 Step (3): Obtaining the average unit area A_p of the images of isolated etch pits, the images being given by the step (2);
- 10 Step (4): Dividing the area S_k of the image of overlapping etch pits k by the average unit area A_p to calculate the number of etch pits included in the area S_k ; and
- 15 Step (5): Totalling the number of isolated etch pits and the number of etch pits n_k included in the image of overlapping etch pits to obtain the total number of etch pits N , so that the etch pits density EPD may be obtained by dividing the value of N by the area involved in the visual field of the microscope.

In the case of varying the area A_p for every measured point, all of the steps (1) to (5) are performed therefor. In the case of using a fixed area A_p for every wafer, the steps (1) to (5) are performed only once for a first wafer and then those steps other than step (3) are performed for every subsequent measured point.

Detailed explanation will be given below.

- 25 Step (1) is to give numbers 1, 2, ..., m to the respective etch pits and obtain the corresponding areas S_1, S_2, \dots, S_m .

In order to obtain the area, a two-dimensional image, which comprises the etch pits and the background thereof, is processed as a binary image in the form of black and white which, for example, corresponds to the etch pits and the background, respectively. Then, the image is divided into a grouping of microscopic cells in the form of a matrix configuration. The area of the cell is a fraction of the area of the etch pit and is extremely small. The area S_i of the etch pit i is estimated by counting the number of cells which fill that etch pit.

The method of obtaining such area is publicly known.

In step (2), discrimination between isolated etch pits and the groupings of etch pits can be accomplished by the following:

5 Superimposing a regular square having a fixed size on an etch pit and investigating the shape and size of parts which protrude from the four sides of the square, and then, if the parts protrude equivalently therefrom, that etch pit is considered to be an isolated etch pit and if not, to be a grouping of etch pits; or

10 Superimposing a circle having a fixed size on an etch pit and then, if the etch pit is included therein, it is considered to be an isolated etch pit; or

Predetermining several standard patterns for isolated etch pits and superimposing these patterns on an etch pit
15 and then, if there is a coincidence between the etch pit and one of the patterns, it is considered to be an isolated etch pit.

Thus, depending upon the shape and size, discrimination between isolated etch pits and groupings of etch pits
20 can be accomplished. This discrimination has been effected by conventional methods.

After discrimination between the isolated etch pits and the groupings of etch pits, an average value of the area of an isolated etch pit is obtained and this value is
25 considered as an average unit area A_p at that measured point. Assuming that the number of isolated etch pits is u ,

$$A_p = \frac{1}{u} \sum_{(i)} S_i \quad (4)$$

wherein (i) means the sum in relation to the isolated etch pit. This comprises step (3).

30 Step (4) is to divide the area S_k of the image of the overlapping etch pits by the average unit area A_p and to obtain the number of etch pits n_k included in the area S_k , or

$$n_k = \left[\frac{S_k}{A_p} \right] \quad (5)$$

35 where the representation [...] means that, in connection with values in the bracket, fractions of .5 and over are counted as a unit and the rest are disregarded.

Step (5) is to obtain the total number of etch pits
N, or

$$N = \sum_{(i)} 1 + \sum_{(k)} n_k \quad (6)$$

where the representation $\sum_{(i)}$ of a first term means the sum

5 on the isolated etch pit and $\sum_{(k)}$ means the sum on the group-

ing of etch pits.

Assuming that the number of isolated etch pits is u,

$$N = u + \sum_{(k)} n_k \quad (7)$$

Fig. 4 is a sample of a microscopic image at a certain
10 measured point on the wafer surface. Although the number
of etch pits is relatively large in fact, for the sake of
simplicity, a small number of etch pits are shown.

First, numbers are given to the respective etch pits,
e.g., Nos. 1 through 8 as shown in this sample. Next, the
15 area S_i of each of the etch pits is measured.

For the convenience of explanation, tables may be
utilized. In these tables, "Etch Pit No.", "Area" and
"Number of Etch Pits" are represented in horizontal columns,
while the data on each of the etch pits are put in order in
20 vertical columns. In an actual measurement, of course,
such tables are not used.

TABLE I : Data after the measurement of the areas
of the numbered etch pits [Step (1)]

No.	Area	Number of Etch Pits
1	6	
2	8	
3	4	
4	4	
5	19	
6	9	
7	5	
8	10	

Table I represents the data after step (1). The area corresponding to each of the etch pits is put in the associated column, as a multiple number of an area of any unit. The areas of Etch Pit Nos. 1, 2, 3, ... are given as 6, 8, 4, ..., respectively. Thus step (1) is completed.

In step (2), isolated etch pits are distinguished from the groupings of etch pits. It is assumed that, by means of the steps as described above, each of Etch Pit Nos. 1, 3, 4, 7 has been perceived as an isolated etch pit. In the case of an isolated etch pit, the numeral "1" is put in the corresponding column of "Number of Etch Pits" of the table. In the case of a grouping of etch pit, the corresponding column of "Number of Etch Pits" remains vacant. This is shown by Table II.

TABLE II : Numeral "1" in the column of "Number of Etch Pits" corresponding to an isolated etch pit [Step (2)]

No.	Area	Number of Etch Pits
1	6	1
2	8	
3	4	1
4	4	1
5	19	
6	9	
7	5	1
8	10	

Step (3) is to obtain the average unit area A_p of each isolated etch pit. Etch Pit Nos. 1, 3, 4 and 7 are the isolated etch pits, respectively, and the areas corresponding thereto are 6, 4, 4, and 5, and therefore

$$A_p = \frac{1}{4}(6 + 4 + 4 + 5) = 4.7$$

The area S_k of the grouping of etch pits k is divided by A_p and then the quotient is rounded off to be an integer which is considered as the number of etch pits n_k . For

example, the respective areas of Etch Pit Nos. 2, 6 and 8 are 8, 9 and 10, and the value obtained by dividing each of such areas by A_p ($=4.7$) and rounding the quotient off is 2. Also, the area of Etch Pit No. 5 is 19, and the value obtained by dividing it by A_p and rounding off is 4. Thus, the value of n_k is put in the column of "Number of Etch Pits" corresponding to the grouping of etch pits. This is shown in Table III.

TABLE III : n_k in the column of "Number of Etch Pits" corresponding to the grouping of etch pits

No.	Area	Number of Etch Pits
1	6	1
2	8	2
3	4	1
4	4	1
5	19	4
6	9	2
7	5	1
8	10	2

In this manner, regarding the number of etch pits, the values for Etch Pit Nos. 1 through 8 are perceived as 1, 2, 1, 1, 4, 2, 1 and 2.

In step (5), by totalling these values, the total number of etch pits $N=14$ can be obtained.

Finally, the etch pits density (EPD) can be obtained by dividing the total number by the area of the wafer surface within the scope of the visual field.

Industrial Applicability

The present invention can be used to measure the etch pits density on the wafer surface of a semiconductor. The semiconductor wafers can be formed by slicing the ingots of single crystal such as GaAs, InP, Si and Ge.

Generally, the present invention may be applied to a general system for measuring the number of particles in a continuous member.

Claims:

A method of counting automatically the number of etch pits comprising the steps of enlarging the surface image of a semiconductor single crystal wafer by a microscope, converting the enlarged image to video signals by a TV camera, image-processing an etch pit image on the wafer surface by a computer to obtain the area of the etch pit, dividing the area S_k of a grouping of overlapping etch pits k by the average unit area A of an isolated etch pit to calculate the number of etch pits n_k included in the area S_k , and obtaining the total number of etch pits N by totalling the number of etch pits n_k all over the wafer to calculate the etch pits density thereof, said method characterized by further including the steps of calculating the average unit area A_p of the isolated etch pit for every wafer or at every measured point thereon, dividing the area S_k of the grouping of overlapping etch pits k by the average unit area A_p , rounding off the quotient to be an integer so as to obtain the number of etch pits n_k included in the area S_k , and obtaining the total number of etch pits N by totalling the number of isolated etch pits u and the number of overlapping etch pits n_k .

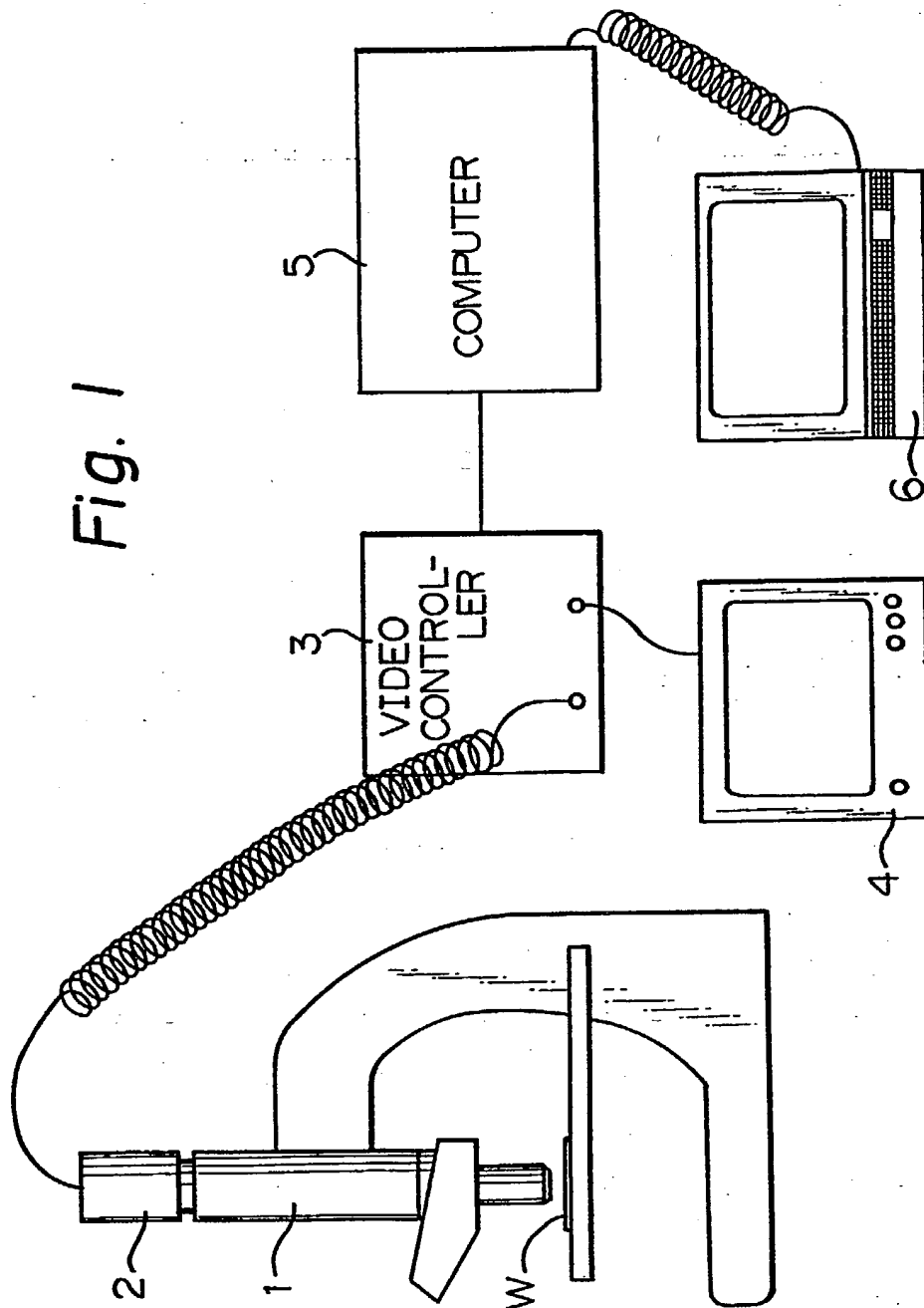


Fig. 2

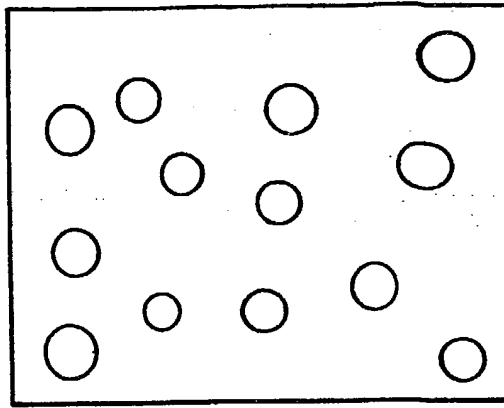


Fig. 3

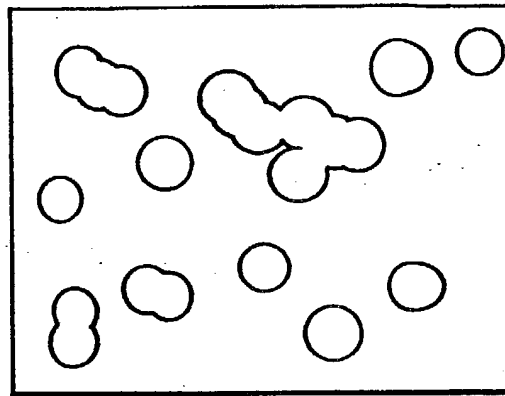
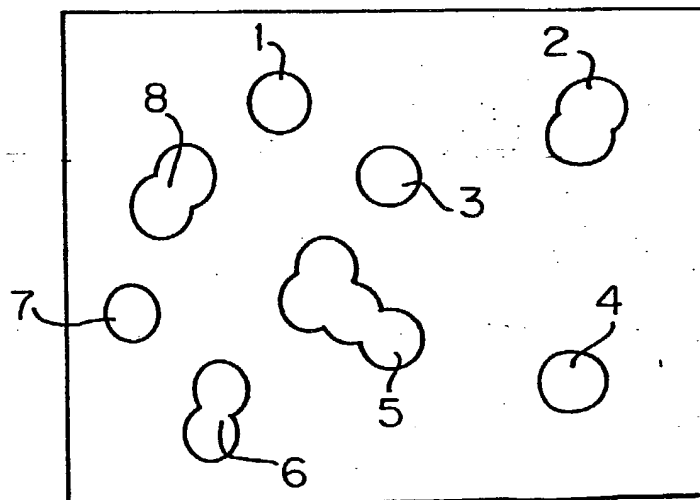


Fig. 4



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/JP84/00378 **0149685**

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (If several classification symbols apply, indicate all) ³		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 5px;"> Int. Cl³ H01L 21/66, G01N 21/88 </div>		
II. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum Documentation Searched ⁴		
Classification System	Classification Symbols	
IPC	H01L 21/66, G01N 21/88	
Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched ⁵		
III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT ¹⁴		
Category ¹⁵	Citation of Document, ¹⁶ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ¹⁷	Relevant to Claim No ¹⁸
Y	JP, A, 57-57246 (Fuji Photo Film Co., Ltd.) 6 April 1982 (06. 04. 82) Page 3, lower left column, line 12 to page 3, lower right column, line 10	1
Y	JP, B1, 46-27639 (Sanyo Electric Co., Ltd.) 11 August 1981 (08. 11. 81) Column 2, line 37 to column 3, line 16	1
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>¹⁹ Special categories of cited documents ¹⁴</p> <p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p> </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</p> <p>"Z" document member of the same patent family</p> </div> </div>		
IV. CERTIFICATION		
Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search ²		Date of Mailing of this International Search Report ²
September 25, 1984 (25. 09. 84)		October 8, 1984 (08. 10. 84)
International Searching Authority ¹		Signature of Authorized Officer ²⁰
Japanese Patent Office		